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SUBJECT: THAILAND: RTG REACTIONS TO APRIL 3 TRIPLE BOMBINGS IN SONGKHLA PROVINCE

REF: BANGKOK 2401

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Clarke. Reason: 1.4 (d)

11. (SBU) Summary: The Royal Thai Government (RTG) has responded to the three bombs on April 3 that targeted Hat Yai international airport and other high-visibility targets (reftel) with heightened security nationwide and carefully calibrated words. End Summary.

12. (U) Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, responding to reporters as he arrived at his office April 4, condemned the bombings, expressed his condolences for the dead and wounded, and noted that the latest attacks were carried out when a concerted, unified effort was underway to restore peace in the deep South. He declined to answer a question on whether the suspected bombers were linked to separatist insurgents behind the upsurge in violence in the three southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat during the past year. However, Thaksin said he would seek to maintain a balance between retaliation and reconciliation in his responses, giving particular emphasis to the point that the "conciliatory methods" his administration has adopted in recent weeks would not be abandoned. Thaksin opined that the latest violence could impact tourism and the economy and pledged to take steps to restore confidence as soon as possible. The Prime Minister told reporters that the RTG could handle the continuing violence itself and would not need assistance from other countries.

13. (U) An official statement issued April 4 by the Office of the Prime Minister sounded similar themes. Embassy translation of the Thai language text of that statement follows:

Begin Text: "It is the policy of the Royal Thai Government to promote national reconciliation and adhere to peaceful means to resolve the situation in the South and promote an atmosphere of unity among the entire Thai nation as can be seen by the establishment of the National Reconciliation Commission.

It is, therefore, unfortunate that certain groups of individuals have been responsible for the tragic bombing incidents involving the use of small explosives in Songkhla district and Hat Yai district on the evening of Sunday, 3 April 2005, resulting in the loss of lives and injuring a number of people as well as causing severe damages to government and private properties.

The Royal Thai Government would like to express its deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and those who were injured in the incidents. The Royal Thai Government has instructed the competent authorities to extend full assistance to all the victims. The Royal Thai Government condemns in the strongest terms such heinous acts of violence and will exert its utmost efforts to bring those responsible for the incidents to justice. At the same time, the Royal Thai Government has taken additional steps to tighten security measures, particularly in the sensitive areas, in accordance with international standards.

The Royal Thai Government is fully convinced that the demonstration of unity and cooperation among all the Thai people throughout the nation in creating an atmosphere of genuine national reconciliation will help deter those who are behind such heinous acts of violence from becoming further emboldened and engaging in such inhumane acts in the future."

End Text.

14. (U) The RTG has beefed up security nationwide and is intent on demonstrating that it has done so. Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Chidchai Vanasatidya, Thaksin's personal choice as the top RTG security official, chaired an April 4 meeting of security and intelligence chiefs. The measures this committee plans to put into place (and have in some cases) include heightened security in all international airports in Thailand, i.e., more patrolling officers, installation of additional closed circuit TV surveillance cameras, use of sniffer dogs, strict enforcement of "no unattended luggage" rules, and closer screening of

individuals. Chidchai said the highest international security standards would be maintained to restore confidence among travelers and he compared the new level of security to that during the October 2003 APEC Summit in Bangkok. In addition, Chidchai also established a task force to protect other targets judged "vulnerable," including popular tourist spots in Bangkok. The Metropolitan Police claimed April 4 that over 250 points in Bangkok, and more than 180 points elsewhere, have been identified for enhanced security -- patrols and more surveillance cameras -- even though no intelligence, Thai officials publicly stressed, indicates that Bangkok is a potential target. Reportedly, oil depots and public transportation systems like the Sky Train and new subway system will also receive greater security attention. An informal Embassy survey April 5 revealed that tightened security is indeed visibly in effect at airports.

15. (C) Comment: Prime Minister Thaksin and the RTG seem to have immediately grasped that the latest bombings of clearly international targets change the situation they face with southern violence and could fuel fears about Thailand with real consequences for tourism and the economy. They have taken steps to show their seriousness in redressing security deficiencies and to restore confidence. It is notable that Thaksin is exercising uncharacteristic discipline in his comments to the press, sticking to his recently announced new policies of balance in addressing the sources of southern violence, and yet trying to direct a comprehensive security response to a heightened threat. It remains to be seen how long and competently this response can be sustained but, for the moment, the RTG appears committed to acting responsibly.

End Comment.

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